

The Open Mike^{District 2}

A Newsletter From Councilman **Mike Knapp**

Volume 2, Number 3

April 2006

A Moment at the Mike

FY 2007 Budget Must Stay Balanced, Accountable



Councilmember Knapp

As regular as baseball or basketball season, the county's budget season is once again upon us. And while it seems I was only just asking you to let me know of your comments on the county's FY 2006 budget, I'm back to ask you to do the same for the upcoming FY 2007 budget.

The County Executive has forwarded to us his budget proposal, and it's a good place to start the discussion. I'm very pleased that the County Executive's proposal came in at the charter limit this year – the charter limit, you'll remember, reflects the county's ability to live within the property tax limit set forth in the county's charter. So, a budget proposal that stays within the charter limit means that we're working to ensure we don't spend more than we take in – in other words, it's a balanced budget.

There's more good news – not only are we beginning our discussion of the budget by assuming we're going to live within our revenues, but our estimated revenues for next year are *up*. What that means is that the fiscal discipline we exercised last year – in which we ensured that we set our spending priorities and stayed within the charter limit – is paying dividends.

Higher revenues doesn't necessarily mean that we're running a surplus, as some have asked me, but it does mean we have more flexibility in the kinds of programs and services in which we can invest your money. But just because we have more resources doesn't mean we should spend in a cavalier manner. This is still your money, and every dollar counts. We need to continue to ask questions and demand accountability of our programs. Increased revenue doesn't mean accountability goes to the back burner.

As always, accountability means we need to continue to establish our priorities. What programs are most critical? What are the "must haves" as opposed to the "nice to haves"? Last year, I publicly announced what I believed those priorities to be – public safety, education, infrastructure (such as roads) and services for the neediest populations – and I still believe these should be among our first concerns. The entire Council affirmed its priorities last fall implementing the resolution that I introduced last year. Again, we're fortunate that we have the luxury of having more spending options this year, but we in government still shouldn't be too easy with your money.

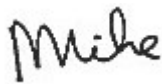
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Budget (continued from page 1)

The Council will continue to hold public hearings on the budget in the coming weeks and months (click [here](#) to see the hearings schedule for April), and I encourage your input and involvement. In the meantime, let me know of your views on the budget – which programs and services are important to you, and where you think the Council needs to invest your resources to ensure our county remains a great place to work and live.

As always, feel free to [contact me](#) if I can be of any assistance to you. It's my pleasure to serve.

Regards,



Mike Knapp
Councilmember, District 2

Knapp Calls For Repeal of Predatory Lending Law

*** Public Hearing on Knapp Bill to Repeal 36-04 to be Held On April 25 ***

When the County Council approved Predatory Lending legislation (Bill 36-04) late last year, I made clear my reservations about the impact the law could have on even the most scrupulous of lenders. One of my biggest concerns was that the law was so vaguely and broadly worded that it couldn't be implemented in a way that would effectively separate the chaff from the wheat -- in other words, the law would drive off not only disreputable lenders as intended, but the reputable ones as well. In the end, I feared that the very law intended to protect our most vulnerable consumers would actually make it much more difficult for those same consumers to find a reputable lender who could help them find and secure a loan.



Consequently, I voted against Bill 36-04 -- but I still held out hopes that the more unclear provisions of the bill could eventually be deployed in a manner that would not discourage conscientious lenders from doing business in our county when the law went into effect on March 8. Regrettably, however, many lenders decided that Bill 36-04 presented them with unquantifiable risks, and was so potentially onerous, that they decided they would no longer provide loans to residents of Montgomery County. As the March 8 implementation date loomed, more and more lenders began to pull out of the county, leaving in the lurch countless residents who were either refinancing or preparing to buy a home.

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Repeal *(continued from page 2)*

In all, some 25 lenders pulled out of Montgomery County, taking more than \$3.8 billion in loans with them. While this amount represents about 15 percent of the market share, the impact in the county was still enormous – and to those residents who had sat down to close on a house, only to be told their lender was no longer available, it was a matter of immediate, personal concern. Letters and phone calls came pouring in from countless residents from around the county who had been preparing to refinance or buy a home, and who now found themselves in limbo.

On March 2, I issued a [statement](#) urging my colleagues to support my call for a repeal of the law. As I said at that time:

With the refusal of these lenders to do business in our county, there is a very real risk that this legislation will now limit the opportunity for some of our neediest residents to secure a loan – an unintended, but very real consequence that was raised during debate on the legislation, and the precise predicament this bill was enacted to prevent. I have heard from numerous frustrated residents who were in the process of securing loans and while they would have had no problems in doing so last week, this week they can't. We must respond to these issues.

The bill that passed the council was a theoretical exercise; the practical effect is that real people of all backgrounds who live in our community are now finding it even more difficult to purchase or re-finance their home – that's just not right. I urge my colleagues to join with me and repeal this legislation as quickly as possible.

Any future legislation needs to be clear in its execution, not just in its intent.

Meanwhile, the Circuit Court was scheduled to consider a motion for a temporary suspension of the law. On March 7, the Circuit Court ruled that the potential harm to the financial services industry outweighed the county's interest in enforcing the law, and suspended enactment of the law until at least July 6, when the court will hold a hearing to discuss the law.

The court's decision, as I said in a [statement responding to the circuit court's decision](#), was a welcome reprieve -- but a reprieve alone is not enough. That's why I introduced Expedited Bill 4-06 on Tuesday, March 14 – with the support of Councilmember Denis – calling for the immediate repeal of the predatory lending law.

Once we successfully repeal the law, however, there is still some work in front of us. We must straight away bring together stakeholders to identify specific problems, identify the real issues, and then draft an appropriate legislative solution – if one is needed – to address these problems. Any future legislation needs to be clear in its execution, not just in its intent.

There will be a hearing on my legislation on April 25 at 7:30 p.m. I hope you'll help me identify the major issues facing consumers applying for loans, and how the Council might improve any future predatory lending legislation. [Click here](#) and let me hear from you -- and stay tuned for more information as it becomes available.

Council Should Clarify Role and Expectations of Park and Planning

This has been a difficult year for Park and Planning, and I believe we are beginning to make progress on reforms. We are now facing a critical point. We have a strong professional staff, but a number of key positions at the agency are presently being filled on an interim basis; meanwhile, the term for the current chairman of the Planning Board expires in June.



The National Capital Park and Planning Commission in the 1930s, a precursor to today's M-NCPPC Commission.

Given the critical role Park and Planning plays in the development – and, therefore, the character -- of our communities, it's vital that the top positions at the agency be filled by individuals with the vision and leadership necessary to ensure that Montgomery County continues develop and grow responsibly and in a manner that reflects the vision of the residents and their respective communities.

While the Department of Park and Planning is essentially an independent agency, the County Council does have oversight responsibility, including oversight of their budgets and final land use authority. The County Council also appoints and approves the Planning Board Chairman position, as well as all other Board positions, so it is vital that we on the Council take a thoughtful, measured approach to filling the position that will run the agency. It's a big job, with big expectations – the Chairman administers all activity within the agency – and the council needs to make its expectations clear. I'm not convinced we've done a good job of making our expectations clear in the past, so it's time that we do so now.

Who should be Chairman of the Planning Board, then? At this point, it matters more that we detail what that person should be doing, and what their responsibilities should be. We need to very carefully describe our expectations of the job. Once we know what that job really looks like, then we can find the right person to fill it. And as a number of seats on the board become vacant, we need to set the proper tone and lay out the right expectations necessary to ensure the agency regains its credibility and recovers its reputation as one of the leading planning agencies in the United States.

I think it's also critical that the Planning Board remain accountable to you. That's one of the reasons why I proposed in March that the Council consider relocating the agency somewhere in the Rockville Core, where most of county government is already located. My feeling was that since the population center of the county is located in Rockville, we should give serious thought to

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Planning *(continued from page 4)*

making Park and Planning more accessible and more convenient for people to attend hearings or meetings at Park and Planning. The agency's present location in Silver Spring, I argued, makes it inconvenient to much of the county's population.

I also believe that greater coordination between Park and Planning staff and that of the Executive Branch – the Department of Permitting Services and the Department of Public Works and Transportation, for example - could be achieved if they were located in closer physical proximity. If we want to encourage better oversight, communication, and accountability, I believed my proposal was worth discussing as one factor that could help us focus on these key objectives. However, a majority of my colleagues disagreed, and I withdrew my motion to begin the formal discussion.

You can be certain I'll continue to work for government that remains both accountable, and accessible to you. The Council is continuing to look at ways to improve services at Park and Planning. Keep watching *The Open Mike* for the latest information.

Damascus Master Plan Moves to Full Council for Consideration

The Damascus Master Plan came before the full Council for consideration and action on Tuesday, April 4th. The Council's Planning, Housing, Economic Development (PHED) committee completed its deliberations of the Master Plan on Monday, March 27th and forwarded it to the full council with a favorable recommendation. *[Note: At the time of publication, final Council recommendations were not yet available. Please look for a complete write-up in next month's issue.]*



An artistic view of Jimmie Cone, a Damascus tradition for 40 years.

As your representative and advocate on the Council, I have met with many of you who call Damascus home. The involvement of the community in the planning process has been nothing short of excellent, with the community turning out not once, but twice, to fill the county's hearing rooms to capacity to offer testimony on the draft plan as well as a high level of participation in the Master Plan committees over the past few years. This is because you recognize, as I do, the need to continue to allow Damascus to retain its rural flavor, with a historic neighborhood character.

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Damascus (continued from page 5)

There are elements within the plan, such as the town center zones, that should allow Damascus to become pedestrian-friendly and therefore an even more vibrant focal point for the surrounding community. While Damascus will grow somewhat in the future, it is important that growth conforms to the vision of the community and fits seamlessly with both existing development and the transition to the surrounding agricultural landscape.

One item to stay aware of is the proposal to allow the county the option to reserve land for a possible future bypass. If you are a long time resident of Damascus, you are already very familiar with the bypass issue. Just over ten years ago, when the Master Plan was up for renewal, a bypass that would have diverted north-south traffic around the center of the town came up for discussion. At that time, the Council decided to do nothing further with the issue. During the current Master Plan discussion, Council staff reminded the PHED committee of this unresolved issue; consequently, the PHED committee asked for additional information and public input. The County's Park and Planning staff complied, and a public question and answer session – which I was pleased to attend -- was held at the Damascus Public Library on March 29.

The Planning Board will be taking up the bypass at its April 20th worksession.

The Planning Board itself will be taking up the issue at its April 20th worksession, and I encourage you to let the Planning Board members know of your comments and concerns. Write, call, or e-mail them directly to let them know your views ([click here](#) for information on how to contact the Planning Board). After Park and Planning reviews the options, the bypass issue, and any recommendations, will be brought to the Council at the beginning of May for further deliberations and a vote.

It is important to keep in mind that the decision at hand is whether or not to reserve land necessary for further study of a possible bypass, and not whether to build the bypass itself. Any bypass, if approved, would not be built for at least another 15 to 20 years. The purpose of reserving the land is to keep options open should traffic patterns and density change and/or worsen in the future, making a bypass a desirable alternative.

In addition, given that a bypass would carry commuters from Frederick, Carroll and Howard counties, there are multi-jurisdictional issues at stake here, which makes the need for a county/state study critical. Given the significance for both the community at large and property owners in particular, it is critically important that you make your voice heard by both Park and Planning and my colleagues here on the Council.

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Mass Transit Legislation Advances in State Committees

As noted here [last month](#), a number of initiatives are presently making their way through the [Maryland General Assembly](#) that would provide resources specifically for mass transit. In March, a number of them made some serious progress, as hearings were held in both the Maryland State House and State Senate on five bills that are of particular interest to those of us with an interest in finding new and creative ways to fund mass transit and transportation. I've got a real interest in these initiatives not only because transportation and transit options are critical matters in the Upcounty region I represent, but also because I serve as Chairman of the [Transportation Planning Board for the National Capital Region](#) -- and in that capacity, one of my overarching goals is to ensure our region finds new ways to provide funding for mass transit.



On March 7, then, I traveled to Annapolis to testify before the House Ways and Means Committee -- and, later in the afternoon, before the House Environmental Matters Committee -- in support of four bills that would provide funding for transportation and mass transit options around the state. The Ways and Means Committee was considering three separate bills, each of which proposed new and viable ways for providing funding directly to mass transit.

The first two bills under consideration that day, [HB 981](#) (authored by Delegate Barkley) and [HB 1392](#) (authored by Delegate Kaiser), would provide funding for mass transit through tax revenue specifically designated for such purpose, while the third bill, [HB 1345](#) (authored by Delegate Hixson) would create a new mass transit line item with the existing State Transportation Fund. All three of these proposals are worth consideration. As I said in my testimony before the committee:

The revenue that would be generated and collected by these initiatives can be put to good and immediate use in communities around the state. These additional resources can be used to bolster the transit infrastructure for Metro, and jump-start new, critical projects like the Corridor Cities Transitway in Montgomery and Frederick counties, the Bicoounty Transitway for Prince Georges and Montgomery County, and the proposed Red and Green lines in Baltimore. Each of these projects could immediately benefit from the increased investments these bills would provide -- but funding could also be used to improve or create new mass transit systems anywhere in the state, from the far reaches of Garrett county to the tip of Worcester. We have communities throughout the state with a variety of transportation needs that haven't been addressed, because they never believed the resources would be available to help them pursue such projects. With these bills, such resources would be available.

The fourth bill I discussed that day, in the Environmental Matters Committee, was [HB 1312](#), the Driver Responsibility and First Responders Act. This legislation, introduced by Delegate Bronrott, would help to provide a dedicated source of revenue -- through driver enforcement penalties -- to fund transportation initiatives, and to create a First Responder's Fund. The First Responder's Fund would pay for equipment and personnel for fire, rescue, or emergency medical services entities and local law enforcement. This is an investment that will serve not just Montgomery County well, but all counties in our state, giving our first responders the support they need to continue to keep our residents safe.

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Mass Transit *(continued from page 7)*

Later in the month, the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee held a hearing on [SB 850](#), Senator Kramer's bill to create a mass transit account within the State Transportation Trust Fund. This is a proposal similar to HB 1345, and I was pleased to provide testimony in support of this legislation as well.

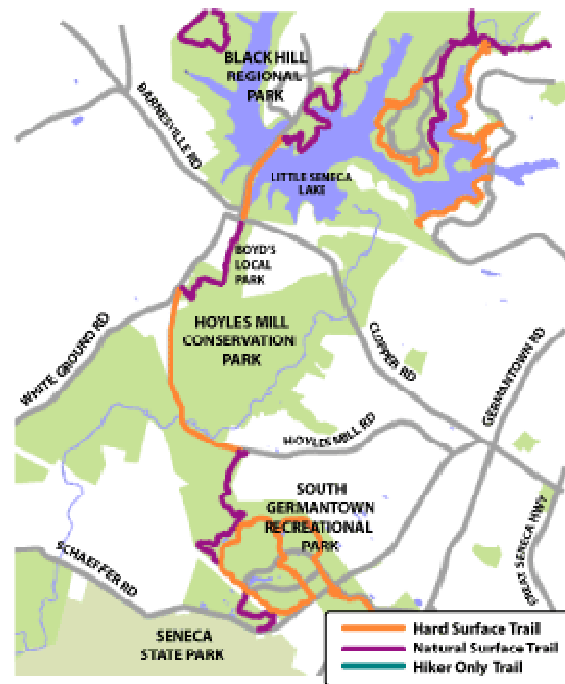
Transportation remains one of the most important issues facing the Upcounty community, and you can be certain I'll continue to push for new and creative ways to provide funding for transportation and mass transit options. I encourage you to let your state legislators know of your support for their efforts -- and I know you'll continue to [let me know your views](#) as well.

Hoyles Mill Trail in Germantown Open For Public Use

The Montgomery County Department of Parks recently announced the opening of the Hoyles Mill Trail for hiking, biking and horseback riding. The Hoyles Mill Trail is located just west of Germantown in the Upcounty region.

This trail joins Black Hill Regional Park and South Germantown Recreational Park using Hoyles Mill Conservation parkland and actual roadways. The trail is finished and directional signs have been installed. Additional trails in Hoyles Mill Conservation Park are still being planned and will be implemented in later years. Trail users should expect to walk on pavement, gravel and natural surfaces.

From the north, the trail will switch from natural to hard surface along Black Hill Road and then Clarksburg Road, then cross the bridge over Little Seneca Lake. From there it will continue across Clopper Road into Boyds Local Park. From Boyds, visitors will continue south into Hoyles Mill Conservation Park on a natural surface and then along Hoyles Mill Road on a gravel path. The trail will turn right onto a natural surface and empty into the South Germantown Recreational Park.



Drinking water and restrooms are available in South Germantown Recreational Park and Black Hill Regional Park. Access and parking are available along Clarksburg Road between Ridgeoak Drive and Top Ridge Drive, at the boat ramp in Black Hill Regional Park on Black Hill Road, and at the South Germantown Recreation Park by the driving range.

Enjoy the Spring weather and take a bike ride or stroll along the Upcounty's newest trail. For more information on this trail, [click here](#), or visit <http://www.montgomerytrails.org/> for general information on Montgomery County's parks and trails.

Education Committee Tracks Progress of Adult Literacy Coalition

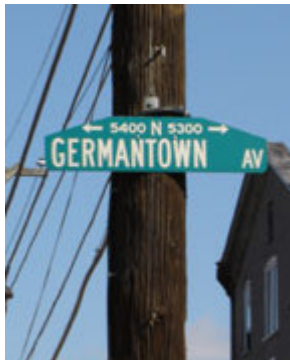
On March 30, the Council's Education Committee received a briefing from the Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (M-CALESOL), a community coalition committed to increasing the resources, quantity and quality of adult education to help the county meet its current and future workforce needs. To this end, M-CALESOL is especially committed to promoting English language instruction, while ensuring that the instruction is relevant to an optimal labor force and quality of life.

With a Board comprised of representatives from the private sector, county libraries, religious community, health care field, higher education, and the community at large, M-CALESOL is helping meet our workforce needs by providing services targeted at day labor and construction, domestic work, health care, maintenance, technology, sales and service training, and workplace skills. The organization has only been in operation for a little more than a year, but is already bringing extra resources to the county for increased adult education and literacy -- and hopes to increase these investments in the future.

As a member of the Education Committee, I'm committed to finding new ways to meet the increasingly complex demands of an increasingly complex workforce. M-CALESOL is working within the present realities of the workforce system to provide new and unique alternatives that will provide access to employment opportunity and self-sufficiency for all residents.

Applications for Germantown Leadership Forum Due April 14

The Germantown Leadership Forum (GLF) is seeking applications from community leaders, advocates, or any Germantown resident who cares passionately about the Germantown community -- which means most residents -- to take part in a program previous participants have called 'a wonderful start to cultivate and energize leadership in the Germantown.'



The GLF believes the strength of Germantown depends upon engaged, informed and visionary citizens who will act in the best interest of the community. To that end, the mission of the GLF is to identify potential leaders and empower them with the information, access and skills necessary to build a cohesive community.

The GLF has put participants together with key leaders to discuss major issues facing the Germantown community, allowing them the opportunity to talk education with Superintendent Jerry Weast and School Board Member Sharon Cox, public safety with Fire Chief Tom Carr and Police District Commander Evie Cahalen, and government with County Executive Doug Duncan and State Senators Rob Garagiola and P.J. Hogan.

The first activity will take place on April 22, in a kickoff event that will include a bus tour of the area and a discussion of *Trends in Germantown*. Space is extremely limited, so **I encourage you to submit an application to my office by April 14, 2006**. Applications are available on my webpage at www.montgomerycountymd.gov.

As the forum sponsor, I've seen first-hand how exciting and energizing the forum can be. Let's work together to invest some of our best resources -- namely, your boundless energy -- back into the Germantown community.

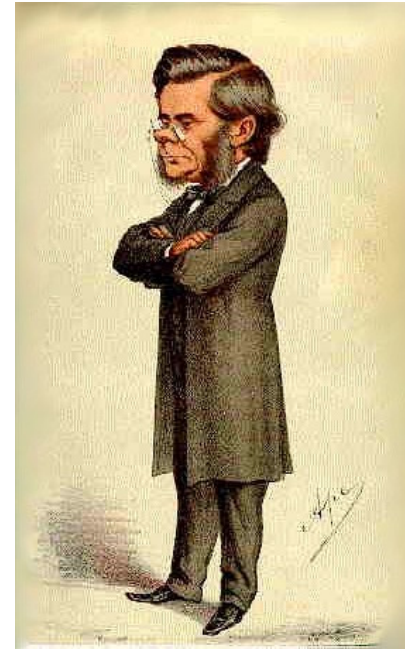
The Upcounty Road Scholar

All-way Stop for Observation at Shakespeare; Streetlights for MD 27 at Skylark Road

Got a road that needs repairing? A traffic light that's out? Is there a street or intersection that you think needs a stop sign or crosswalk? One of my responsibilities is to make sure someone knows about it -- and to do what I can to get you information on your question or request as quickly as possible.

I stay in regular contact with the [Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation](#) (DPWT) and the [Maryland State Highways Administration](#) (MSHA), and provide each agency with a list of projects that need addressing in the Upcounty. Both agencies receive countless requests each week, and getting a response back can take some time. So bear with me -- if you don't see a particular project listed here, that doesn't mean it has been forgotten or neglected, but rather that I haven't received an updated report on its progress this month.

With this in mind, the Road Scholar section of *The Open Mike* provides an opportunity to give you the latest information received from DPWT, MSHA, and others on the progress of requests that have been submitted on your behalf. It's also an opportunity for you to [let me know](#) of other projects that may need to be undertaken in your community. And speaking of letting me know of projects in your community....



Got a question about roads, sidewalks, or construction in your area? E-mail the Road Scholar and let us know.

Request for All-way Signal at Father Hurley at Wisteria (Germantown)

After a number of accidents occurred at the above intersection in the span of only a few weeks, I received multiple requests from the Germantown community for an all-way stop light. A copy of my letter of request to DPWT can be seen by clicking [here](#). And while I haven't yet received a response from DPWT, I do have some additional information on what's happening at this intersection

As part of its plan for developing the surrounding area, the local developer had planned all along to place an all-way stop sign at this intersection -- and as you read this, the all-way stop signs may already be in place. I also learned that, even before I sent my request over to DPWT, the county had already asked DPWT to study this intersection to determine what, if any, other traffic mediation may be required at this intersection. That study began more than a month ago, and will be completed in early May.

As I indicated in my letter to DPWT, the proximity of this intersection to [Seneca Valley High School](#), with its abundance of student drivers, makes this a bit different than the typical intersection. We need to be especially vigilant in making sure traffic mediation is easy to understand -- many high school-age drivers I've spoken with will be the first to admit they're

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Road Scholar *(continued from page 10)*

uncertain of the appropriate protocol at a four-way stop sign – and that traffic moves quickly and efficiently, especially before and after school. This is something DPWT will keep in mind as it studies this intersection to determine if additional mediation is – or is not – necessary.

Naturally, I'll let you know the moment I hear anything. Keep watching The Road Scholar for more information.

Department of Public Works and Transportation Projects

DPWT Responds to Multiple District 2 Requests

I received a lengthy response from DPWT on various requests I've submitted over the past seven months. Rather than reproduce all five pages of the letter I received, I've made the response available as a pdf file you can access by clicking [here](#). If I've submitted a request to DPWT on your behalf in the last year, and you haven't yet heard back, chances are good that it's included in the attached letter. The projects and issues included in this response are, in alphabetical order:

Black Rock Road / Brookeville Road and Reedy Branch / Cashell Road at Cherry Valley Drive / Cinnamon Drive, Stop Signs / Clubhouse Road at Watkins Mill Road / Evangeline Lane, MacDuff Avenue, Thorncroft Terrace / Falls Road, Falls Chapel Way at Tuckerman Lane / Forest Brook Road at Pike View Drive / Founders Way Sidewalk to Damascus Regional Park / Hopkins Road at Kingsview Road / Jerusalem Road / Lewisberry Drive tree trimming / Partnership Road at Sugarland Road / Pettit Way and Pettit Court / Prices Distillery Road / Price Philip Drive / Rocky Road / Spire Street / Stringtown Road traffic volume and speed / Sweepstakes Development / Thundercloud Road at Bubbling Spring / Waters House Signage / Woodcliffe Estates / Wynnfield Avenue and Wild Cherry Lane Street Lights

Of course, if you still don't see your request answered in this response, [let me know](#).

Here's information I've received from DPWT on matters *not* included in the above correspondence:

Parking on Moss Side Lane (Olney): Residents in and near the Cherrywood Community in Olney had expressed concern about parking along Moss Side Lane near the intersection of Cherry Valley Drive. Vehicles parked along the side of the road were not only making it difficult for cars to pass by, but were also blocking access sufficiently enough that pedestrians had to navigate around parked cars by walking in the street. I asked DPWT to see what could be done about reducing or eliminating the number of parked vehicles along this stretch of road. DPWT informed me that Traffic Engineering and Operations is currently evaluating the possibility of restricting parking along the west side of Moss Side Lane, between Cherry Valley Drive and the entrance the Cherrywood Townhome's entrance. This evaluation process should take approximately 4-6 weeks, and any approved restrictions should go into place shortly after completion of the evaluation.

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Road Scholar *(continued from page 11)*

Observation Drive at Shakespeare Blvd (Germantown): This has become an increasingly dangerous intersection, and the lack of any kind of traffic mediation has resulted in a number of accidents, including at least one fatality. Given the increase in residential development in the surrounding areas -- as well as its proximity to the Milestone shopping center -- I asked that DPWT consider placing an all-way traffic signal at this intersection. Here's the response -- an encouraging one, I might add -- I received from DPWT Director Art Holmes:

"A traffic study was recently completed for this intersection. As a result of that study, we will be implementing all-way stop controls for the intersection. The all-way stop will be supplemented with flashing red signals for all approaches, otherwise known as an Intersection Control Beacon (ICB). Additionally, concrete channelizing islands will be constructed on all corners to reduce pavement widths for motorists and pedestrians.

"We did analyze the possibility of a full color traffic signal, but traffic columns are not such that full signalization is justified at this time. Signalization of this intersection is likely in the future as the adjacent office complex is built out and traffic volumes are realized, however, we concluded that implementing a signal at this time will cause unnecessary delays to motorists, whereas safety issues can be addressed with the all-way stop control while minimizing delays.

"The ICB will be designed to allow for easy conversion to a full color traffic signal in the future. Due to the design and construction timeframes needed for the ICB and channelizing islands, we expect that the modifications and controls will be complete by late summer or early fall of 2006."

Improvements for Pedestrian Safety Near Seneca Valley High School (Germantown):

Responding to requests for a review of the signage, speed limits, crosswalks, and pedestrian countdown timers near Seneca Valley High School, DPWT recently informed me of a number of activities in the area that should help make it safer for pedestrians walking in the Seneca Valley area, including enhancement of existing crosswalk markings at Middlebrook Road at Crystal Drive, and Middlebrook Road at Great Seneca Highway, as well as evaluating the need for crosswalk markings for the south side of Wisteria Drive at Crystal Rock Drive. DPWT will also make changes to provide clear and concise speed controls for drivers, and is performing a detailed assessment of the need for additional "No Turn on Red" traffic signs in the area.

Maryland State Highways Administration Projects

MD 355 at Stringtown Road (Clarksburg) A number of residents of Clarksburg had questions about progress being made along the MD 355 as it passes through the Clarksburg community. Here's what MSHA had to say:

"We spoke with the developer responsible for the grade reduction along MD 355 regarding your concerns and would like to share the findings with you. As you indicated, the northbound portion of MD 355 has been lowered and the southbound roadway is still at its original elevation. The developer is quite anxious to lower the southbound portion of the roadway but has been delayed waiting for Allegheny Power to relocate the utility poles in the area. Allegheny Power had informed the developer that the pole relocation would be completed in early January of this year.

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Road Scholar *(continued from page 13)*

"It appears that Allegheny Power's pole relocation includes not only the poles required for the grade reduction, but also those associated with the Montgomery County Capital Improvement Project (CIP), Stringtown Road extension from MD 355 to Gateway Drive. It is the developer's understanding that Allegheny Power is presently in negotiations with homeowners in the areas in question. Typically, according to the developer, once an easement agreement is reached the poles can be relocated within a month.

"The fire hydrant on the southbound shoulder of MD 355, just south of the intersection, is also part of the CIP project. As part of his permit, the developer was required to relocate the hydrant to its present location. The CIP project plans call for the hydrant to be relocated to a more suitable location within the right of way. In this regard, the County contacted the developer to see if he (the developer) would relocate the hydrant to its CIP plan location. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, the developer had already completed his required relocation. At this time the hydrant relocation is controlled by the CIP project and its schedule, and also appears to be held up by the Allegheny Power pole reaction as well.

"Unfortunately, due to the nature of these utility issues there is nothing that the SHA can do to expedite this matter. In the meantime, we have requested that the developer take steps to improve sight distance for southbound MD 355 vehicles wishing to turn left at this location. He has assured us that he will be cutting back a portion of the median within the next two weeks to address this issue. He will also be placing a reflective barrel (or barrels, as needed) to delineate the hydrant."

MD 27 at Skylark Road (Clarksburg) I ask MSHA and DPWT for regular updates on activities at this intersection, which is heavily traveled not only by Clarksburg residents, but by almost anyone who takes the MD 27 toward Damascus and points north. Here's the latest from Darrell Mobley, MSHA Director for the Upcounty region, who also provided some information on what they've heard from DPWT:



"My traffic engineering staff has completed their review of this intersection, and we would like to share the findings with you. We concur with your observations and are submitting a Design Request to our Office of Traffic and Safety to recommend installation of street lighting at the MD 27 and Skylark Road intersection. This lighting will assist motorists from the community and improve safety along the corridor.

"We have been informed by Montgomery County that Skylark Road will be closing again sometime is mid-March. During this closure, the Skylark Road approach to MD 27 will be re-stripped to provide two lanes, the double yellow centerline along MD 27 at Skylark Road

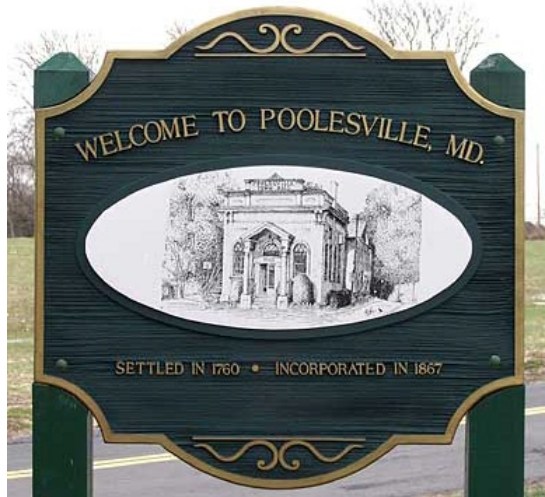
will be repositioned, and a northbound MD 27 by-pass lane will be added."

Safety Improvements on MD 107 (Poolesville): A number of individuals in Poolesville contacted me to let me know of their serious concerns about safety at several points along the MD 107 (Whites Ferry Road), which is the main commuter road into town. Here's what Darrell B. Mobley, District Engineer for our region, had to tell me:

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Road Scholar *(continued from page 13)*

- "MD 107 East of Poolesville Town Limits: My traffic engineering staff has reviewed the signage in advance of the curve cited in your letter. They have determined the chevron signs along the curve need to be upgraded and additional signs added to improve the visibility for approaching vehicles. A work order for these improvements has been submitted to our maintenance shop. This work should be complete as soon as weather and scheduling permits.
- "MD 107 At Partnership Road: In January 2004, my traffic engineering staff reviewed the intersection of MD 107 (White's Ferry Road) at Partnership Road in an effort to improve sight distance. The course of action recommended by the study was the modification of the pavement markings at the intersection. The northbound approach of Partnership Road was removed beyond the spur that would take traffic east along MD 107. The spur was converted to a one-way road. All turns southbound were to be made where Partnership Road intersected with MD 107.



"Shortly after implementing these changes, we were advised by local authorities that this new pattern was detrimental to the local farmers. Their farm equipment and trailers were not able to negotiate the tighter turn radius. In consideration of these concerns, we returned the intersection to its original configuration. However, we are recommending that this location be considered as a candidate for improvements which would include widening of the spur road and the addition of a shoulder along westbound MD 107.

"We should note that this intersection must compete for funding with other intersections statewide, and we cannot guarantee improvements will be made in the near future. Based on our most recent study, we are recommending that lighting be installed at this location. We are submitting a design request to the Office of Traffic and Safety for concurrence and approval. We will advise you of the decisions regarding these proposed improvements when we are notified.

- "Intersection of MD 107 and MD 28: A review of this intersection was done at the same time the intersection of MD 107 at Partnership Road was studied. This particular intersection was analyzed for possible alignment changes by converting the existing 'Y' with a more conventional 'T' intersection to improve the peripheral view for drivers approaching along MD 107. Field investigations of the intersections revealed the intersection to be located along a vertical curve. Modifications to the grade of both roads would be necessary in order to make the 'T' intersection possible. Unfortunately, this new alignment would result in reduced sight distance along the existing curve and for safety reasons is not being recommended

"Observations of the intersections also showed very few drivers turn left onto MD 28 or right onto MD 107. We noted most MD 107 traffic that wishes to travel west on MD 28 are using Sugarland Road to perform that maneuver. Signs along eastbound MD 28 already direct

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Road Scholar *(continued from page 14)*

drivers who want to turn right onto MD 207 to use Sugarland Road. Given these findings, we believe no improvements are necessary at this time. However, to increase driver awareness, we will be adding an advanced intersection warning sign along eastbound MD 28 prior to MD 107."

Sure, You Like The Road Scholar, But...

...if you want to submit your request directly to the Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPWT), you can call **(240) 777-6000** to access most DPWT services on weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Questions, concerns or requests for highway maintenance, traffic and some parking issues can be sent directly to the Department of Public Works and Transportation at the above phone number.

Services are also be available for **potholes, sidewalks, road resurfacing and paving, tree maintenance, mowing, storm drainage, leaf vacuuming, snow removal, traffic signals and signs, streetlights, street name signs, lane markings and crosswalks, traffic calming measures, subdivision development plan review, parking policies, and the parking lot districts.**

County Council Public Hearings Calendar

Council Seeks Input on FY 2007 Operating Budgets

Don't be shy! The County Council regularly holds public hearings at which we actively seek your input, thoughts, comments, and suggestions. The policies, amendments, and legislation under consideration aren't just pieces of paper; they have a very real impact on you and the lives of your fellow citizens. For this reason, residents are always encouraged to attend the public hearings and give us your views.

Hearings are held in the Council's main meeting room on the 7th Floor of the County Office Building at 100 Maryland Avenue in Rockville. ([Click here for a map.](#)) If you wish to testify on any of the items listed below, please call (240) 777-7931.

One more thing -- the hearing schedule can change rapidly, so **always check the [County Council's homepage](#) to get the most up-to-date information.**

(The Calendar for April appears on page 16)

County Council Public Hearings for April

DATE	TIME	MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION
April 4	1:30 p.m.	Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 06-07: Farm building Supplies and Construction, C-1 Zone
	1:30 p.m.	Supplemental Appropriation to the County Government's FY 2006 Operating Budget for Fire and Rescue Services: - \$2,630,000 for Homeland Security Grant Award
April 5	1:30 p.m.	FY 2007 Operating Budgets
	7:00 p.m.	FY 2007 Operating Budget for MCPS
April 6	7:00 p.m.	FY 2007 Operating Budgets
April 17	7:00 p.m.	FY 2007 Operating Budgets
April 18	1:30 p.m.	Amendment to the Master Plan for Historic Preservation: - Higgins Tavern
	1:30 p.m.	Resolution to approve the National Capital Region Mutual Aid Agreement
	1:30 p.m.	Supplemental Appropriations to the County Government's FY 2006 Operating Budget: - DPWT: \$720,000 for Custodial Contract for County Facilities - DPWT: \$4,163,830 for Division of Transit Services - DPWT: \$1,000,000 for Emergency Tree Maintenance - Office of the Sheriff: \$627,320 for Courtroom/Courthouse Security and Transport Program - Circuit Court: \$143,890 for Adjudication Program - DOCR: \$1,751,910 for Detention Services, MCCF Program - DHHS: \$181,640 for Behavioral Health and Crisis Services, Shelter Services Program
	7:00 p.m.	FY 2007 Operating Budgets
April 25	1:30 p.m.	ZTA 06-08: Accessory Buildings - One-Family Residential Zones
	7:30 p.m.	Expedited Bill 4-06: Commission on Human Rights - Discrimination In Housing - Repeal
April 26	7:30 p.m.	Transportation & Environment Committee/WMATA Joint Hearing: - Glenmont Garage

The Open Mike Wants You!

Are you sponsoring an event or having a meeting, and want to invite residents from around the county to participate? Did you or your organization win an award? If you have information you'd like to submit for possible inclusion in an upcoming issue of *The Open Mike*, please send an e-mail to Brian.Jones@montgomerycountymd.gov, and let us know.

Vox Pops

Voices From Around the Upcounty Community

A Note from Mike: I receive countless phone calls, e-mails, and letters each day. Most are passionate, many are frustrated, and a few are downright funny...but all of them are thoughtful and well-intended. I think readers of The Open Mike will be interested to hear what their Upcounty neighbors have to say, whether they're across the street or across the county. With that in mind, the "Vox Pops" section of my newsletter features highlights from some of the correspondence and phone calls I've received in my office over the past month.



Bring the Nationals to Comcast

"Why do we allow Comcast to have a monopoly in Montgomery County? It seems they pretty much do what they want, charge what they want and allow us to see what they want us to see. You can be sure that come January 1st, the announcement of an increase will be coming in the mail and letting us know that they've added another cooking channel or garden channel to their line-up. Now, I want to watch the Nationals games on television. I'm even willing to pay extra for it. Why do they have the right to keep these broadcasts off of the air. They charge me \$70 a month for a bunch of channels that I never watch. Montgomery County should put pressure on them to put these MASN games on television (even if they offer it as a premium. Regardless of the dispute they have with MASN, I believe they have a responsibility to air this network, if that's what, I'm sure, a large group of Montgomery County wants to see. Who gave them the right to tell us what we can watch?" -- Steve

Open Mike Readers Support CCT, Long-range Transportation Planning

"After reading your comments in 'A Moment at the Mike: Getting Around: Strains, Trains, and Automobiles' (*The Open Mike*, Winter 2006), I have the following comments. (1) Metro dedicated funding: I thank you for your support in obtaining dedicated funding for Metro. It will allow Metro to do better long range planning rather than a limited one year to the next. (2) Corridor Cities Transitway (CCT): I support CCT in concept "if" it is intended to be a feeder systems to a central backbone transportation system such as Metro. I do not support the long range plan for a 31 mile extension to US 15 in Frederick County which would compete with a Metro extension to Frederick. (3) Long range planning should be for a seamless infrastructure with a central high capacity backbone.... The most significant link missing on the backbone today is connecting Metro to BWI airport. National is already connected (and very popular) and Dulles is being engineered as we speak. Thank you for your support of a public transit system." -- Richard

"I wanted to send you a short note to let you know that I'm definitely for the Corridor Cities Transitway. The framers of the Clarksburg Master Plan had the foresight to include many contingencies that, if implemented, will go along way to making Clarksburg what it was intended. I remember reading the Master Plan and looking at the artist rendering showing people getting off of the Corridor Cities Transitway stop and walking home to their house or car from a point within Clarksburg proper. Think of how many cars that this would take off of the road. I know that I for one would use it as this location would be much more convenient than going to Shady Grove. As it stands today, by the time I trekked to Shady Grove exiting off of I-



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Vox Pops (continued from page 16)

270 I would already be at work if I kept straight. We need to bring the transit to major areas where people live. I thank you for time and consideration and I hope that you will agree with me that the CCT is worth fighting for." -- *Melissa*

Keep Library Parking Free

"I must strongly object to charging for use of any of the Montgomery County Libraries parking lots. We should be finding ways of encouraging residents to visit the library, not discourage them. Please bear in mind that many residents have to drive some distance to access a public library in Montgomery County." -- *Tom*

Help Wanted: From the County Board of Elections...

Here's something I received from the Montgomery County Board of Elections that I thought might be of interest to students throughout the county. For more information, please contact Gilbert Zelaya at Gilberto.zelaya@montgomerycountymd.gov, or by calling (240) 777-8505.

Board of Elections Seeks 1000 Student Aides to Work at 2006 Elections

The Montgomery County Board of Elections is seeking 1,000 school-age students, grades six-12, to serve as election day student aides during the 2006 Gubernatorial Elections.

Students and their guardians must attend mandatory training to serve and, if applicable, to receive Student Service Learning (SSL) credits. Students will be placed according to home addresses into neighboring precincts. This initiative combines civic participation with an opportunity to observe democracy in action.

This program is available to all students within a public, private, independent, religious or home-schooled setting located in Montgomery County. U.S. citizenship is not a pre-requisite to participate. Students with bilingual and American Sign Language skills are encouraged to apply.

Interested students should supply the following information: student and guardian's full name and email address; home address; phone number(s); school name and address; grade level (as of fall 2006); and shift preference (6:30 – 10:30 a.m. or 4:30 – 8:30 p.m.). If bilingual, or fluent in sign language, indicate what languages are spoken. Information should be sent no later than June 1 to: Dr. Gilberto A. Zelaya, Future Vote Initiative, Board of Elections, 751 Twinbrook Parkway, P.O. Box 4333, Rockville, MD 20849-4333. The information can also be faxed to 240-777-8505 or email Gilberto.zelaya@montgomerycountymd.gov.

The formal job description for these positions appears on page 19.

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
2006 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS**

Primary Election - September 12
General Election – November 7

OFFICIAL STUDENT HELPER:

Purpose: To inform and assist voters in polling places, in an effort to attain a quality voting experience for each voter.

WHILE SERVING AS AN OFFICIAL STUDENT HELPER:

No political opinions or advice expressed at any time.
No cell phone use.
Appropriate casual dress code; no jeans.

POSITION DESCRIPTION:

1. Greet voters, clearly, articulately, offer assistance and/or voter information such as sample ballots.
2. Be aware of and offer suggestions for voters having difficulty with standing.
3. Regarding Voter Access Cards, maintain oversight of Voter Access Card box and provide voters with verbal direction to place cards in box; do not handle cards. Cards must remain in polling room.
4. Maintain neatness in polling room and hall leading into polling room; be able to move around polling room and hallway, pick up and dispense literature/trash.
5. For voters, open doors to polling facility as necessary.
6. Provide directions to rest rooms and polling room exits as necessary.
7. Be able to provide voters with accessibility information and be sensitive to all voters including those with special needs.
8. If requested, be able to provide voter information assistance in a second language or American Sign Language (ASL).
9. If TV is available on-site, direct voters to voter information showing on TV/VCR; oversee functioning, i.e. if tape problem, fix it or if TV problem, work through Chief Election Judge to contact Building Service Manager or Facility Contact.

In polling places with unique physical structures, assist with voters' access to polling room, via such as elevators, gates, key or pad locks

Councilmember Mike Knapp
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850
(240) 777-7955

Councilmember.Knapp@montgomerycountymd.gov